

02/02/25 - Luke 1:57-80 - "What Then Will This Child Be?"

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Preacher: Brenton Beck

[0 : 00] Please turn with me to the Gospel of Luke 1, 57 through 80. That's Luke 1, 57 through 80.

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have to call him Zacharias after his father. But his mother answered, No, he shall be called John.

And they said to her, None of your relatives is called by this name. And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, His name is John.

And they all wondered. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, Blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors.

[1 : 04] And all these things were talked about through the hill country of Judea. And all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What then will this child be?

For the hand of the Lord was with him. And his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people. And he has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David. As he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant.

The oath that he swore to our father Abraham should grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear.

In holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people and the forgiveness of their sins.

[2 : 14] Because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death to guide our feet into the way of peace.

And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel. This is God's word. Thanks be to God.

Well, praise the Lord. Whoever has been predestined to be here is here. Raise your hand if you know someone's sick. Amen.

It is going around. The Lord is helping build Steel Valley Church's immune system. Amen. Especially your pastors. Today.

Right now. So, hey. We're here, and we'll see how far along in the sermon I get. The Lord wills. I'll get to the last sentence that he had me prepare today.

[3 : 15] So, it's great to be gathered here in the house of the Lord. With our Bibles open. There's no better place to be right now than here. Amen.

So, the forerunner is here. John has been born. Now, births of children always kind of bring about a lot of questions.

Especially when they grow old. In diapers. In toddlerhood. The questions get worse. But, sometimes we might ask, how can something so small make such loud noises?

I ask myself even today with our kids. Or, how can such a tiny human being produce such a large quantity of fecal matter?

Is it not true? It should be illegal. Right? How? We might ask, will we ever get sleep again?

[4 : 32] I'm still asking that. My oldest is 11 years old. They won't wake up for school on the weekdays, but then all of a sudden they're up at 6 a.m. Chipper.

Ready to start the day when we're looking forward to sleeping in. Right? Will we ever get sleep again? These are the questions we ask. Now, I've personally asked those questions, but I've also asked more serious questions in a reflective sense, especially holding young children in the NICU for our twins.

And these reflective questions, as you're looking upon this newborn child, you ask all sorts of things. You don't know about the dirty diapers yet.

They're going to pull a fast one on you. But, like, what will their gifts and calling be in life? What kind of person, an adult, will they grow up to become?

What legacy will they leave behind? And it's true. Parents dream about these things often.

[5 : 50] I still have not stopped dreaming for my kids. To hold a tiny newborn child and realize that God has entrusted these children to me for a certain period of time until they become adults and I return them to the care of the Lord.

Holding them in such a fragile state, knowing that one day they will be suffering for the Lord.

They will be entering trials. They will be entering joys. It's truly an unexplainable reflection holding a newborn child.

In the text today, the community surrounding the birth of John inquire a similar question with John. They say in verse 66, what then will this child be? It's remarkable that this child was even alive.

[7 : 01] Being birthed from an elderly old woman named Elizabeth, who has been barren all of her life. That all of a sudden, the judgment that came upon Zachariah of his unbelief, that God was going to do this miracle, would actually happen.

And pondering that, the audience here is standing around this newborn child saying, what then will this child be? Now, unlike our humorous reflections on human and impressive defecations, this question from the community is not just sentimental in like a sense of potential.

What's this child going to become? But this is rather a prophetic anticipation. This is a unique question into the very purpose that this child has in the nation of God's people.

Because a God who was once silent for 400 years, has broken the silence, Zachariah can't hear or talk, there's an elderly woman pregnant, what in the world is going on?

And as you can imagine, they ask, what then will this child be? Are we in trouble? Is this good news? Or is this possibly the worst period that we'll be entering into our lives?

[8 : 41] Within this question, Luke captures the mystery and the magnitude of God's unfolding plan. And while this birth story reveals something about John, that the inquiry is about John, it is far greater to see what's being revealed about God through this child.

And so the sermon title is pretty simple. I'm sick. Give me a break. What then will this child be? And I'm going to break this up into three sections.

I thought it was appropriate according to the structure. And I'm going to use these three sections to answer that question. And by the end of our time, as we stand back and look at this passage, we'll see that God's faithfulness fulfills His promises and prepares the way for salvation.

So let's pray as we enter into this work and begin together in verse 57.

Let's pray. Father, we pray that You help us to understand Your Word by the power of Your Holy Spirit guiding us.

[10 : 06] The very Spirit that informed every pen stroke of the page helps to affect every pen stroke upon our hearts. Help our ears to be receptive of Your Word today.

And have our hearts be humbled. We praise in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. And so the first section, we see a child of mercy.

What then will this child be? That was a good cue for the phone notification. What then will this child be? Bloop! Just a reminder to mute your phones for the sake of your neighbor.

And we have in verse 57, Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, had shown great mercy to her.

They rejoiced. And once again, Elizabeth takes center stage in the excruciating pain of childbearing.

[11 : 22] Contraction after contraction. Now this is tough on a young woman, not to mention an elderly woman, right? I mean, before the 19th century, one of 10 women to one of 25 women would

die from childbearing before the 19th century.

And Luke then turns our attention to the response of this community. They're amazed. Right?

They're excited. You got the New York Times and everyone making those headlines.

Elderly woman gives birth. We're once barren, now birthing. However you want to swing it. This is a big time.

They surround her. They rejoice with her at this time. You see, this child's existence was an act of God's mercy according to verse 58.

They heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her. Elizabeth, barren, beyond childbearing age, experiences God's supernatural intervention.

[12:37] Fulfilling His promise. And we have to see something happening here that's incredible in a larger scope of the plan of God's redemption.

Is that God's mercy turns barrenness into birth? God's mercy turns silence into a song.

They rejoice with her. And so the day comes. They bring out the knife. Right? In verse 60, they begin to do the circumcision.

And obviously, you know, that's a painful experience as well. But this is following the law of God according to Genesis 17 and Leviticus 12. On the eighth day, a child will be permanently marked with an external sign of God's promise.

Right? And this represents the relationship between God and His people. It was established long ago. And then it got to the naming.

[13:43] Babies crying from getting snipped. And then they're like, well, next on the list, we got to choose a name. And it would probably be appropriate for this child to be named Zachariah Jr.

Right? And names were chosen for their apparent meeting. That wouldn't be a bad name for a child. And we see here the mother rebuttals the mother answered, no.

He shall be called John. And they said to her, none of your relatives is called by this name. So was God doing something traditional here?

Right? You got Mary who we saw last week. Mary is a pregnant virgin. That doesn't sound traditional.

You got all the expectations of this crowd saying, John? Why not Zachariah Jr.?

[14:56] I mean, Zachariah's name is still relevant. It still applies, meaning the Lord remembers.

But the mark of this child, it would be more appropriate for God to name this child according to what He's doing through this child, meaning the Lord is gracious.

Needless to say, in verse 62, they don't trust this woman. They're like, maybe she's had too much of that painkiller. I don't know what they used back then. Maybe some alcohol or something like that.

In verse 62, they make signs to this deaf and mute father, Zachariah. Look, make signs. inquiring of what he wanted him to be called.

We'll go to the man of the house. And he asked, and they asked him, he asked for a tablet, so he picks up an iPad. His name is John, he wrote on it.

His name is John. Some point of Zachariah's discipline of being unable to speak, arguably unable to hear because they're making signs.

[16:15] I think that reinforces he was deaf and mute. They were united on the front that they will yield and submit to God's plan for this child.

Meaning the Lord is gracious. And they all wondered until verse 64. And immediately his mouth was open.

And his tongue loosed. And he spoke blessing God. If that doesn't get a crowd's attention, there is no hope.

It's got their attention. You see, if this child was the mark of mercy for Elizabeth and at the moment Zachariah's vocal cords were engaged and loosed to speak, this child would become a mark for grace even for him too.

The Lord is gracious. In other words, God is using this child not only inside the womb. His purpose began inside the womb, but that was through discipline and mercy revealing to Elizabeth.

[17:35] But what a mission within these eight days. This baby's still peeing and pooping with diapers. And he's still accomplishing God's mission and purpose in his life.

that the Lord is gracious. It was clear that God was vindicating and restoring. But to a crowd who has had silence from God for 400 years, since the close of the Old Testament, fear came upon all

their neighbors in verse 65.

And these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea. And all who heard them laid them up in their hearts saying, what then will this child be?

For the hand of the Lord was with them. You see here, joy turns to fear.

They were rejoicing and now they're fearful. And the same word here is using the same cardiac arrest that Zechariah had in the holy place in the temple when Gabriel showed up and said, surprise!

[18 : 56] Right? They're fearful. Fearful. The normal response is fear when someone is confronted by divine visitation and the mighty work of God like we saw with Zechariah.

And additionally, as we go through the Gospel of Luke, he will actually note this multiple times. He often reports fear in the presence of God in His works throughout His Gospel.

And so we'll be tuned to that as we continue throughout the months. But it was clear that the hand of the Lord was upon this child in a very unique and new way.

John's life was a prophetic sign that God was on the move. And when God is on the move, it brings a fearful reality.

Doesn't it? It's odd. You see, joy and fear often walk together. when God is on the move.

[20 : 05] It's like reverently crying at the foot of the altar. I believe in our culture today, we could use a healthy dose of the fear of God.

God and I know you just amen. We love our amens. We love our joys.

I know it's coming. I'm just kidding. But we love these things. We love rejoicing. We love being happy. We love being suffer-free and trial-free, pain-free.

We love health. We hate this sickness. Right? But often we mistakenly exchange fear for joy rather than balancing them together proportionately.

God desires for us to respond to Him rejoicing but to also fear Him. His holiness. don't forget Mount Sinai.

[21 : 16] You couldn't even touch the mountain. We just read that in our reading plan. I believe our culture today could use a healthy dose of fear.

And the gospel tells us that those who are in Christ have no reason to fear but it doesn't say to just have joy and not fear and have reverence for the Lord.

We don't have a reason to fear obstacles, opposition, anything in this life that can come against us because by grace through God and our faith in Jesus Christ we have a reason to rejoice but also a reason to fear because the gospel also informs us and it says that we are unworthy and how can we possibly being unworthy receive something that's completely opposite of what we deserve.

This is how we do fear the Lord because He chose us and we don't deserve it. And so Zachariah unpacks this reality that it truly is about God.

It's not about this child. And we see in the second section here a child of preparation not only a child of mercy but a child of preparation.

[22 : 48] Let me get a cough in. Echoing the Magnificat from Mary last week Zachariah begins Benedictus it's a song of thanksgiving and from verse 37 all the way to verse 75 Zachariah focuses on a specific tense here.

He focuses on the past tense looking back at a blessing that began with God and stems back to David and then all the way back to Abraham.

Doc says to Marty we have to go back. Right? And they go back. Zachariah travels back in time. In verse 67 we're going to just read some of this. And his father Zachariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied. yeah Zachariah is back in faith not doubt.

Verse 68 blessed be the Lord God of Israel for he has visited and redeemed his people and was and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.

[24 : 18] You see here Zachariah's first declaration is God's visitation that a holy sufficient God would visit people on this earth.

He declares this visitation in his divine grace and being past tense this indicates that God's salvation is beginning to be unveiled through John.

And you see this raising of a horn of salvation kind of costal say amen to that. God's saving power is symbolized by the ox's horn.

This is imagery from Psalm 18 2. God is doing something the mighty God is powerful something that he began through his servant David but he says Marty we got to go back further right verse 70

as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenants.

Diving back further in time here God's salvation was always near even in the times of Israel's rebellion the nation's rebellion.

[25 : 46] think of it through the possession of the land of Canaan in Genesis 12 and Genesis 22 the promise began long ago even amid the past 400 years of God's silence.

He says Marty we still need to go back and he goes back into verse 73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham to grant us that we being delivered from the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all of our days.

You see God never forgets his promise and John's birth wasn't just a miracle it was a message to this nation especially to those who place their faith in Jesus Christ just as the faith of this nation would be able to serve the Lord without fear in holiness and set apartness sanctified sins and righteousness before him all of our days.

Those of you who place your faith in Jesus Christ even today your name is in the book and by the power of God's unchanging grace it remains in his book whether you feel worthy whether you have joy or whether you have fear he remains and we see something happen in these last couple verses here there's another tense shift as the child of God's faithfulness is revealed the tense shift goes from past to present he says and you child you will be called the prophet of the most high for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways I don't know if you've seen Lion King but I could imagine just as Rafiki pulled up that little cub and lifted that thing up this is

Zachariah here with the child you child you got the Pharisees back there calling CPS right you child you will be called the prophet of God you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways you this child would be going forth before the king making way of people ready for the king right heralding the approaching honor that's behind him and so too John would be going before the Lord just as he is born chronologically in history before the Lord Jesus Christ and even in his infantile state the work of preparation has already begun these people are fearful they're wondering if they're in trouble he says that this child will go before the

[29 : 25] Lord to prepare his way to give knowledge in verse 77 of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins because of the tender mercy of our God whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death to guide our feet into the way of peace what then will this child be is actually the wrong question the question in the wrong tense instead it's what is then this child because this child is already preparing the way for the Lord this child is a sign that God is always faithful to his covenant all of his covenant promises no matter how dark it is he is the rising sun and it's a remembrance that the rising sun has come to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death to guide our feet into the way of peace and as he prepares the way of the

Lord we come face to face with the Messiah who will be following him and our feet would be guided to the way of peace the way of the Messiah Luke ends with a summary statement we just went through a series in the book of Acts we had a lot of summary statements Luke gives another summary statement here John basically went off the grid he grew up strengthened in the wilderness and what a symbolic sense of the hope that grew for this nation who was once lost in a similar wilderness throughout their nation nation's history John disappears the Messiah is coming when God prepares the way of salvation salvation it's honestly not a time to question his ways it's a time to trust his plans we can trust God in the darkness we can trust God in the silence and yes even for nine months as Zachariah experienced discipline of the

Lord we can trust God in his holy discipline in our lives God's promises often take time but they never fail so as we reformat this question to what then is this child what is your answer it's a question that is echoed throughout history about every person that God has called for a purpose from Moses to David to Jeremiah to his disciples to Jesus and today it's a question for you how does John's birth prepare us today for the Lord are we living in the joy of God's mercy are we making light of the fear of the Lord and just treating God like our spiritual vending machine are we making noticeable room in our lives for

Jesus are we trusting God even when his plans take quite a long time to unfold so whether you're waiting whether you're grieving whether you're celebrating or even struggling the hand of the Lord is still on you for those who belong to Jesus Christ and whether you understand his plan or not God is

still writing your story right and whether you feel strong or you feel weak God's faithfulness does not change trust him he is always faithful see God's faithfulness fulfills his promises and prepares the way for salvation are we prepared today let's pray